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ABSTRACT

Using the results of 50 returned surveys, the study examined the beliefs of elementary and secondary school teachers concerning what they think the principal does in special education, with particular emphasis on the mandates of P.L. 94-142 (the Education for All Handicapped Children Act). Among findings were the following: nearly half stated that the principals offered suggestions for classroom arrangement, very few principals served on the advisory or placement committee, many social and civic organizations provided auxiliary services for special needs students, and the principals knew more about the law than they shared with teachers. A copy of the survey instrument is included. (SB)

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THE PRINCIPAL IN SPECIAL EDUCATION:

THE TEACHER'S PERSPECTIVES

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A Summary Paper

Presented

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November 13-14, 1980

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ABSTRACT

The Principal In Special Education: The Teachers' Perspectives

Public Law 94-142 has mandated that meeting the needs of exceptional learners be accommodated in the schools in the most least restrictive environment. With the addition of other programs to the school's present curriculum, the principal's responsibility for implementing and maintaining quality programs for special needs learners has increased greatly. The quality of school programs have often been attributed to the principal's leadership.

The purpose of this study was to examine the beliefs of elementary and secondary school teachers concerning what they think the principal does in special education. Using the results of 50 of 64 returned surveys of a Lickert Scale of 1-5, responses indicated that teachers perceive the principal as an instructional leader in some areas of special education.

Conversely, based on the teachers' responses, there appear to be several areas where principals need to focus more attention. These areas include: acquainting the teachers with Public Law 94-142 and its provisions, increasing classroom visitations, more attention to scheduling, and serving on the placement committee. Attention to these areas may produce an increase in the quality of programs for special needs children. Suggestions for further research are suggested.

Submitted by:
Dr. Charles W. Bonds
Dr. John Lindsey

THE PRINCIPAL IN SPECIAL EDUCATION: TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES

The principal has often been described as the instruction leader of his faculty. His leadership determines the success or failure of school programs. With the advent of Public Law 94-142, The Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, more programs have been added to the school curriculum, therefore, expanding the principal's role as the instructional leader. If the principal is to be effective in implementing the spirit and law of the new legislation, it is imperative that he not only becomes aware of the law's provisions but also what his faculty perceives as his role in special education. Robore (1979) states that the principal is "critical if mainstreaming. . .is to become an effective method of meeting individual needs". Payne and Murray (1974) believe that the principal, by virtue of his leadership role, must be considered a key person in instituting changes for special needs children. Rebore (1979) reiterates that the principal should "foster a growth-producing atmosphere".

PURPOSE

This study examined the attitudes or beliefs of elementary and secondary school teachers pertaining to what the principal does in special education since the passing of Public Law 94-142.

Sixty-four elementary and secondary teachers enrolled in graduate classes at Georgia Southern College were administered ten (10) questions in a Lickert Scale format of 1 to 5. The responses were 1-Always, 2-Frequently, 3-Occasionally, 4-Rarely, and 5-Never. Of the 64 surveys returned, 14 were not completely filled out or were completed by persons teaching in vocational or technical colleges. The remaining fifty (50) surveys were used in the study. This was equivalent to

78% of the surveys being usable in the study. Further examination of the surveys revealed that the sample consisted of forty-one females (82%) and nine males (18%). Forty-seven (94%) had taken at least one course in special education and three (6%) had not.

The subjects were requested to respond to the 10 questions by indicating on the scale what the principal actually does relative to some of the aspects of Public Law 94-142 and other matters related to special needs children. Special needs children were defined as those requiring services and instructional practices beyond those of average or regular students.

The questions asked the teachers and their responses in percentages are presented below.

Question #1 "Does the principal offer suggestions for classroom arrangements for special needs children?"

The teachers' responses were as follows:

36% - Always
12% - Frequently
18% - Occasionally
18% - Rarely
16% - Never

That nearly half (48%) of the respondents stated that the principals offered suggestions for classroom arrangement is encouraging. This suggests that the principal is functioning as an instructional leader.

Question #2 "Does the principal plan and enforce an effective schedule for special needs children?"

The teachers' responses were as follows:

20% - Always
8% - Frequently
32% - Occasionally
20% - Rarely
20% - Never

If special needs students are to receive adequate time for instruction, planning and enforcement of effective schedules are imperative.

From this diminutive survey, the principal must give more attention to this necessary area.

Question #3 "Does the principal assist the teacher with interpretation of test data?"

The teachers' responses were as follows:

36% - Always
18% - Frequently
20% - Occasionally
10% - Rarely
16% - Never

If teachers are to respond appropriately to student needs, diagnostic data must be interpreted properly. To know that principals assist teachers in this area is commendatory.

Question #4 "Does the principal function on the advisory or placement committee?"

The teachers' responses were as follows:

16% - Always
10% - Frequently
22% - Occasionally
22% - Rarely
30% - Never

Apparently very few principals serve on the advisory or placement committee. To more fully understand why students need to be placed in special classes and to be more fully aware of students in the programs, it is felt that principals should serve or be involved in the placement process.

Question #5 "Does the principal seek outside funds for materials?"

The teachers' responses were as follows:

38% - Always
6% - Frequently
28% - Occasionally
16% - Rarely
12% - Never

Seeking outside funds for materials was encouraging. This indicates that the principal perceives the need for additional money to maintain quality programs.

Question #6 "Does the principal conduct inter-class visitations?"

The teachers' responses were as follows:

22% - Always
18% - Frequently
20% - Occasionally
18% - Rarely
22% - Never

Quality supervision of instructional practices is frequently viewed as essential for quality programs. The number of low responses in this area probably reflected that principals should make more classroom visitations where special needs students are enrolled.

Question #7 "Does the principal read professional journals and share his readings with teachers?"

The teachers' responses were as follows:

38% - Always
16% - Frequently
18% - Occasionally
14% - Rarely
14% - Never

That teacher stated that principals read professional journals was very encouraging. It reflects the fact that most principals attempt to keep cognizant of developments in special education.

Question #8 "Does the principal seek services from outside agencies for special needs children?"

The teachers' responses were as follows:

16% - Always
20% - Frequently
30% - Occasionally
14% - Rarely
20% - Never

Many social and civic organizations are willing and exist to provide auxiliary services for special needs students. From these teachers' responses, the principal needs to devote more time to acquiring services from outside agencies. He may be neglecting important sources of assistance.

Question #9 "Does the principal acquaint teachers with the provisions of Public Law 94-142?"

The teachers' responses were as follows:

26% - Always
12% - Frequently
24% - Occasionally
14% - Rarely
24% - Never

Although 96% of the respondents had matriculated in a special education class, and knew of P.L. 94-142, the small percentages for the top three categories were surprising. To protect his teachers, himself, and insure that his teachers understand the law, it is imperative that this area receives more attention.

Question #10 "Does the principal explain P.L. 94-142 at parent organization or PTA meetings?"

40% - Always
16% - Frequently
24% - Occasionally
8% - Rarely
12% - Never

From the responses of the teachers, the principals know more about the law than they share with teachers. It is encouraging that 80% of the principals referred to took the time to acquaint parents with the law--a praiseworthy effort.

CONCLUSION

This brief survey of teachers' perception of what the principal does in special education revealed that even in this new area, the principal continues to function well in instructional leadership capacity. Most of the principals of the teachers surveyed perceived the principal as effective in offering suggestions for classroom arrangement for special needs students, aiding with test interpretation, seeking outside funds for materials, reading professional journals, and acquainting parents with Public Law 94-142. For these aspects of his involvement with

special education, he should be lauded.

As perceived by the teachers and reflected in their responses, there are areas that probably should be addressed more fully by the principals if programs are to be more effective. The principals, as indicated by the teachers, need to examine their response to the following: acquainting ing teachers with P.L. 94-142, conduct more classroom observations, examine scheduling practices, and serve on the placement or advisory committee. If the school is to provide more adequate services for special needs students, the principal is the key to success. His leadership will determine the success or failure of such programs.

The Teacher Perception of the Principal's Role in Special Education

By
Dr. Charles Bonds
Dr. John Lindsey

Grade and/or Subject Taught:_____ County/System:_____

Years of Experience:_____ Age:_____ Sex:_____ Approximate School Size:_____

Have you had a course in Special Education? Yes_____, No _____

This is a survey to determine how teachers (elementary and secondary) feel about what the principal does in special education since the passing of Public Law 94-142.

Please complete the following items. This information will help the school in providing better services for children with special needs.

Never = 1; Rarely = 2; Occasionally = 3; Frequently = 4; and Always = 5

	Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Frequently	Always
1. Does the principal offer suggestions for classroom arrangement for special needs children?					
2. Does the principal plan and enforce an effective schedule for special needs children?					
3. Does the principal assist the teacher with interpretation of test data?					
4. Does the principal function on the advisory or placement committee?					
5. Does the principal seek outside funds for materials?					
6. Does the principal conduct inter-class visitations?					
7. Does the principal read professional journals and share his readings with teachers?					
8. Does the principal seek services from outside agencies for special needs children?					
9. Does the principal acquaint teachers with the provisions of Public Law 94-142					
10. Does the principal explain P.L. 94-142 at parent organization or PTA meetings?					